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ABSTRACT

Seven workplace education projects funded in the first year of the Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative are reported. This report includes both general observations and specific information in case studies of the projects. Overall information is provided on students served, the importance of partnerships, the emphasis on English-as-a-Second-Language projects, the need for coordination, barriers to student participation, the range of educational approaches, the difficulties of measurement, and the elusive nature of job advancement and higher pay goals. Case studies of the following projects comprise 32 pages of the report: T.J. Maxx Distribution Center (Worcester); EASCO Handtool Company (Springfield); Employment Resources Inc. laundry workers, including components with Middlesex Community College and Marriott (Boston/Lynn); IUE/The Work Connection (Lynn); AT&T (Lawrence); and Columbia Cable (New Bedford). (LB) Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education.

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Workplace Education Initiative
Case Studies and Observations

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Introduction

Between April and June,1987, Centre Research (CR) conducted site visits to the seven workplace education projects funded in the first year of the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative. Each site visit was approximately 2 1/2 days in duration and involved a review of written materials, on-site observations (including classroom observation wherever possible) and interviews with key local actors.

In order to insure the comparability of the information gathered at the various sites, CR staff used a single comprehensive protocol for all of the interviews. (see Appendix) The interview protocol was developed after initial background discussions and interviews with the three key state actors involved in the creation and oversight of the initiative: Gail Ewer, from the Department of Education, Marty Blatt from the Executive Office of Labor, and Sondra Stein, from the Office of Training and Employment Policy.

This document summarizes and highlights what CR staff learned during the background interviews and site visits. The organization of this report reflects the dual purpose of our investigation--to document the existing projects and to gather a base of information that will inform the development of an evaluation system.

In the first section, "Observations" we share some of the dominant impressions we were left with at the end of the site visits. The second section, "Case Studies" presents specific information about the projects. Each Case Study begins by describing the history of the project and the particular concerns and issues that arose during the start up phase. The profiles also include information on the students currently being served, the approaches and materials being used by the learning providers, and the configuration and functioning of the local partnership. Finally, the case studies conclude with an assessment of the progress made and barriers encountered.

Observations

Because the purpose is not only to "capture and record" the salient features of existing projects, but also to lay the groundwork for an overall evaluation system, we thought it would be useful to share some general observations and impressions that emerged from our information gathering efforts. Any set of "findings" based on such a quick review of programs, however, must be considered tentative at best. Our goal is to direct attention to those factors that could make a difference in the functioning and effectiveness of the workplace education projects in the years to come.

As one would expect in the first year of a demonstration project, there are a number of gaps between the broad mission and goals of the initiative and the ways this initiative is being translated in the field. Many of the observations we share below have to do with the difficulty in translating a concept into specific program design, and then in implementing this design in a variety of settings, with various actors, organizational constraints and individual needs.

1. Importance of Partnership

The notion of partnership is very central to the Workplace Education Initiative. The Initiative itself began with an unusual collaboration among representatives of three State-level agencies: DOE, EOL, and OTEP. At the local level, projects were developed by partnerships involving SDA's and learning providers as well as some combination of unions and/or businesses. It is thus not suprising to find that virtually everyone involved in the workplace education initiative agrees on the importance of collaboration among key agencies and organizations.

This apparent agreement, however, obscures several potentially knotty issues. Part of the point of demonstration projects is to experiment with different definitions of partnership as well as different configurations of partners. This means that there is no one definition of what constitutes a partnership, nor is there a formula for what is expected or required of the various partners. While this flexibility has left room for partners to work out their relationship, it has also meant that some issues have not been discussed or worked out as fully as they might have been. Collaboration among agencies and organizations is difficult to achieve in any situation; it is especially difficult in the demonstration phase of a project where so much is evolving and changing. It is also, however, particularly critical to sustain collaboration and communication throughout this period.

In the first year of the Initiative, most of the projects have enjoyed the support of key actors representing the designated "partners." The collaboration of these actors has been vital to the design and start-up of the projects. For the most part, however, these partnerships have functioned on a somewhat ad hoc and informal basis, with decreasing commitment and clarity as to their roles and responsibilities as the year progressed from planning to implementation. Most partnerships have lacked a forum for

ongoing discussion of the goals of the program, as well as assessment of its functioning and review of its outcomes.

The development of partnership has proceeded somewhat differently at the state level, where the representatives of the three cooperating agencies have continued to work closely together and sustain both their commitment and clarity. With the partnerships at both the state and local levels still evolving, however, it has been difficult for State level actors to nurture and develop the third layer of partnership, the vital collaboration between the State and local level.

In the coming year, it will be important to pay close attention to all three levels of partnership: the collaboration among key actors on the local level, the collaboration among the three state agencies, and the collaboration between the state and the local levels. Specifically, effort will be required to move from the somewhat ad hoc, informal basis on which the partnerships have existed toward a more systematic and defined set of structures, expectations and processes. At the same time, there must be enough flexibility to allow the various partners to continue to work out and work on their relationships, roles and responsibilities.

2. Need for Coordination

The vitality of the local partnerships and ultimately the effectiveness of the programs themselves seem related to how programs are addressing the need for coordination. Projects range from one with a full-time coordinator (New Bedford) to one where the coordination function is shared among two or three representatives from different agencies, with no one person having more than 10% of his/her time devoted to the project (Metro North).

Not surprisingly, in those programs where there is a clearly designated coordinator it is easier to identify a working, functional partnership. The coordinator, in effect, has facilitated the evolution of the partnership, helping to figure out how to sustain the collaboration and how to develop a system where all relevant parties are involved in a systematic way and where all key actors feel committed to making the program work.

Where the coordination function is more diffuse, the effectiveness of the program has been largely a function of the the individual commitment and clarity of the on-site people, particularly the teachers and the front-line managers or work supervisors. With or without the prodding or assistance of an overall project coordinator, work supervisors or union representatives have assisted in the recruitment process and in the ongoing support of workers engaged in the educational process; teachers have developed curricula, maintained at least minimal contact and communication with managers, and attempted to address the education needs of their students.. While such commitment on the part of on-site actors is desirable, however, it should not be a substitute for the organizational commitment of the partnership or the leadership and support that can be provided by a project coordinator.

3. The Focus on ESL Programs

The majority of Workplace Education programs are focusing on ESL. While students with limited English proficiency were always seen as a very important target population, the degree to which programs are focusing on this population is somewhat surprising. In fact a number of programs began with the explicit idea to serve more of a range of students, including higher level ESL students as well as ABE and GED students.

Since the need exists for all of these types of basic education, it is important to try to understand why the emphasis has been placed on ESL, especially ESL students with very limited English proficiency. A number of factors seem to have contributed. First, ESL training is an observed need on the part of those who are in direct contact with the workers, i.e. front line managers, work supervisors, and union representatives. In fact, one important source of support for workplace education comes from managers and supervisors concerned about the lack of English proficiency in their workforce. English proficiency may not be an absolute requirement for many low level jobs, but those who work most closely with workers note a number of reasons why English ability is important.

In some workplaces, health and safety issues are exacerbated when workers cannot understand verbal or written warnings. When instructions have to be repeated several times, and still might not be understood, efficiency becomes an issue. There is also a concern about developing a comfortable social climate and organizational culture in the workplace. Even if the immigrant workers themselves are comfortable speaking to each other in their own language, there may be a desire on the part of management or unions for a common organizational culture that is not splintered by different ethnic groups or languages.

Secondly, ESL is a strongly felt need among many immigrant workers. They have come to the United States to stay and they know that their survival and that of their family will depend, at least in part, on their developing English skills. Because many of these workers have second jobs, or are women who must also care for their families, they are unlikely to be able to attend classes outside of the worksite. Workplace education is a good solution for them.

Although there are many English-speaking workers who would benefit from ABE or GED programs, the need is likely to be less tangible, either for them or their supervisors. English-speaking workers, even if functionally illiterate, are more likely to feel comfortable and more able to communicate in the workplace than those with limited English proficiency. English speaking workers have probably found ways to compensate and accommodate for their lack of skills; they may also be reluctant to sign up for a class if they have already had bad schooling experiences.

Finally the Initiative itself called for serving students below an 8th grade level of skills. While many native-English speaking students fall into that category, the lower the skill levels, the less likely they are to see themselves as ever being able to attain the GED. There are, of course, other incentives that might make a difference. It appears that English speaking workers are most likely to join a class if it is seen as directly related to job promotion (Baystate), or to upgrading their skills in order to keep up with the changing technology of the workplace (EASCO).

4. Barriers to Student Participation

A high degree of interest and motivation among students cannot guarantee that they will enroll in a workplace education program. Barriers to student participation are created by a variety of social factors, including gender issues, practical concerns like transportation and childcare, and the structure of work and family life for immigrant/working class people. Partial release time is a partial solution to these problems. Full release time would open up the opportunity for full participation by all interested students.

In programs where classes are held on site, many students depend on co-workers who are not enrolled in class for rides to and from work. Other students rely on public transportation that is scheduled to accomodate shift changes. Under these circumstances, arriving at work early or staying late in order to participate in class is not possible. One program (T.J.Maxx) partially addresses these problems by supplying a company van to shuttle first shift students to a more convenient public transportation stop, and by actively encouraging what amounts to creative car-pooling. But even here there are problems: it can take a person two to three times as long to get home if s/he takes a different route; and men from some cultural groups refuse to ride in a car driven by a woman no matter how convenient.

Transportation problems can also affect childcare arrangements, which might already be problematic in themselves. If parents cannot rely on their usual form of transportation, travel time to and from a daycare center (or wherever the child is housed during work hours) increases. This increased travel time might tip the balance against participating in classes. Some parents have no choice about dropping off and picking up their children "on time", i.e. immediately before or after work, in which case there is no possibility of attending classes, regardless of transportation concerns.

Furthermore, many workers in the strata targeted for the workplace education programs hold second jobs. These people have to arrive at or leave the worksite at shift change or compromise their attendance at their other worksite. These same reasons also explain in part why many workers are unlikely to attend classes outside the workplace.

Time and location are two primary factors which influence student enrollment. While companies generally view a 50% release time, 50%

employee time policy as a sign of mutual committment, equal time=equal committment is not a proven equation. The availabilty of full release time would no doubt draw a higher number of students.

Within the Workplace Education Initiative in the first year, only large companies offered paid release time, either full or partial. Large companies can afford to offer this benefit, small businesses may not-- or they may not think they can afford it until they see results which may convince them otherwise. Identifying the incentives to encourage businesses to take on this committment is difficult. But creating a climate of positive publicity is a starting place. Workplace education can become fashionable in the best sense of the word-- as something many employers feel they have to offer because "it 's the thing to do". Similarly, if education benefits become identified with other standard benefits like health and life insurance, the easier it will be to incorporate them into benefit packages. This territory is clearly marked for union activity.

5. A Range of Educational Approaches

Learning providers have different reference points for thinking about the relationship between teaching, learning and curriculum and the workplace setting. They employ different approaches ("empowerment"; "applied training"; "one-on-one developmental"); they use different materials (everything from Barnell-Loft to union contracts); and they have different outcomes in mind (reading union-related materials; reading and computing at a level that will entitle the student to a promotion). Some are very sophisticated in tailoring curriculum and methodology to the worksite; some are less sophisticated and rely exclusively on standard ABE/ESL materials. All the programs agree that adult learners do best when they follow an individualized learning plan and proceed at their own pace.

Where unions have taken an active role in the partnership (New Bedford, Worcester, Metro North), there are concerted efforts to incorporate the realities of work life into the curriculum. However, union involvement does not guarantee a work-focused curriculum (Lynn). And a progressive learning provider may direct the curriculum toward a work focus in the absence of union representation (Lawrence).

The intent or effort to incorporate the realities of work life into the curriculum do not always translate easily into classroom activities, especially with low level ESL students. For example, teachers working with laundryworkers wanted to focus on work- related material early in the program, but it took several months to get to simple sentences about burns on the hands and arms with workers who spoke virtually no English when classes began.

The students are not the only learners in this project. Teachers-- those who consciously incorporate workplace issues into their curriculums and those who do not--repeatedly expressed the desire to meet with other teachers in the Workplace Education Initiative to discuss a range of issues from

recruitment, assessment and placement to curriculum, classroom process, and student evaluation. Teachers tended to be especially curious and open about learning how other programs incorporate work-specific materials into their curriculum.

If the State has an agenda for curriculum development, it might do well to begin to clarify it now when the knowledge development in the Workplace Education Initiative is still very fluid and service providers are looking for guidance and dialogue, and when new information about students' needs in the first year can inform the effort. Specifically, this means looking to the ESL needs of a large non-native English speaking population of students and how they can be met.

6. The Difficulties of Measurement

There is consensus among the learning providers about the need to evaluate student progress, individually and as a group. At the same time all note the difficulties of doing so. Linguistic diversity, the range of skill levels within student populations, the relationship between curriculum and business needs, and the small number of class hours per week confound efforts to evaluate student progress.

Should one expect Asians and Asian Indians to learn English at the same rate as Hipanics and Haitians, whose native languages share a common Latin root with English? If the curriculum focuses on mastering language that will allow a student to perform more efficiently at the workplace, are grade-level tests the most appropriate measures of progress? Or could students be evaluated according to in-house standards of workplace competence? For example, when Cathy Rentch did a "literacy audit" of the T.J. Maxx distribution center, she systematically documented the kind and extent of English language skills that are necessary to perform the range of distribution center jobs. Is it ultimately more useful to the student and more congruent with program goals to measure student progress against this job- specific body of knowledge?

The seven programs in the Workplace Education Initiative offer 3 to 5 hours of class time per week. This low level of intensity means that student progress is slow, especially with low level ESL students, and therefore hard to measure in the short run. Progress might not show up as significant grade point improvements, yet workers and supervisors may be pleased with increased communication skills. How long will it take for the effects of a cycle of enrollment to become visible? Defining outcomes and measuring them within the parameters of the Workplace Education Initiative is problematic. The example of the man at Baystate Medical Center who passed a GED test five years ago and has systematically climbed the career ladder in that institution is really the exception held up as the rule in assessing the success of workplace education programs.

7. Job Advancement and Higher Pay: Elusive Goals

It is difficult to generalize across the programs about the role of education in helping workers gain job advancement or pay raises. Each of the programs presents its own special case: T.J. Maxx and the Marriot Corporation are expanding at an astonishingly fast rate and thus purport to have advancement opportunities for workers who improve their English. EASCO Handtools is retooling its production methods and fighting for its survival in Hamden County--if the company does remain there those workers who have upgraded their skills will probably have a better chance of keeping their jobs; Baystate Medical has a contractual agreement to promote workers who increase their grade level.

It seems logical that increased educational and skills levels should increase the opportunity for employment at higher pay-- after all, you have to know how to do something before someone will pay you to do it. This is, in fact, one of the premises of the Workplace Education Initiative. Yet a simple causal relationship between level of education and employment can not be assumed. For individual workers, educational achievement has never been a guarantee of job promotion. On the macro level, although a highly educated workforce may attract business to an area, larger economic forces are also at work, which have little to do with education.

Opportunities for workers to be promoted or to get pay raises appear to have more to do with the economics of the business, industry, and region and with specific contractual agreements than with the quality of the educational program or the educational outcomes achieved. Thus, although job advancement and higher pay are goals of the Workplace Education Initiative, they cannot really become yardsticks for assessing the value or impact of the programs.

Case Study: Worcester

Introduction

In the Summer of 1986, the International Ladies Garment Worker's Union, Newton Buying Corporation (a subsidiary of the Zayre Corporation and parent corporation to the T.J. Maxx Company), the Center for Lifelong Learning (CLL) at Quinsigamond Community College, and the Metro South/West Employment and Training Administration (SDA) formed a partnership to bring ESL instruction to union members at the central distribution center of the T.J. Maxx company in Worcester. T. J. Maxx is a discount clothing and small appliance store. The focus on ESL instruction for a population of limited English speaking union members in a growing business made it an interesting demonstration program in the first year of the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative.

History/Background

In the winter of1986 Carl Proper, Education Director of the New England Regional Office of the ILGWU returned from a meeting with the New York Consortium for Labor hosted by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor, eager to develop ESL and other basic education programs for members of his union in Massachusetts. ILGWU membership continues to fall; the garment industry is being weakened by foreign imports; members are losing jobs and income. He and others reasoned that basic skills education and ESL for non-native speakers provided at the worksite might eventually allow union members to seek and find employment in other industries.

When Proper learned about the availability of money for workplace education programs in Massachusetts, he considered the Newton Buying Corporation as a potential site. It is a socially-minded company with the financial capacity to support an ABE/ESL program. But it wasn't until he reviewed a long list of names of Asian union members from the Eighth Congressional District for work related to Joe Kennedy's congressional campaign, that he understood how useful it might be to target the Newton Buying Corporation as an educational program site. Many Asian union members travelled daily from Brighton to Framingham to work in the T.J. Maxx plant there.

Unfortunately for this initial target population, the Newton Buying Corporation decided to close the Framingham plant midway through the workplace education project negotiations to make way for new corporate headquarters. The site for the workplace education program was changed to the Worcester distribution center where the need for ESL was also great. All employees were offered jobs in Worcester; some decided to commute; others did not.

In the ten years since the first T. J. Maxx stores were opened in Massachusetts, the company has grown to 228 stores nationwide, and has seen billions of dollars in profit. The company is still expanding and is a

major employer in the Worcester community. (T. J. Maxx employs 800 people in the distribution center). Worcester is home to many different immigrant populations, especially a large Hispanic population. Low paying service jobs are plentiful in Worcester and employers offer perks like training or paid vacation in the first six months of employment to attract employees. T. J. Maxx management hoped their ESL program would attract members of the various ethnic communities to work in the distribution center, although even management is surprised that T. J. Maxx has reportedly become the employer of choice in the Hispanic community, largely because of the ESL benefit.

The warehouse is organized such that supervisors instruct associates on a daily basis to perform any one of a number of jobs: moving, tagging, sorting, shipping, etc. If supervisors spend long periods of time giving instructions directly or through translators to associates with limited English language skills, production is slowed and the margin of error in work performance can be high. Management hoped that providing ESL instruction would eventually result in more fluid and accurate communication between supervisors and associates, thereby building morale withing the workforce and keeping production high.

Between April and August 1986 a series of planning meetings were held with representatives from the union, T. J. Maxx management and the state offices supporting the Workplace Education Initiative (EOL, OTEP, DOE) to discuss the feasability, design, and implementation of an ESL project. In August, following the suggestion of Sondra Stein at OTEP, Carl Proper contacted the Center for Lifelong Learning at Quinsigamond Community College about providing education and coordination services for the ESL project. The CLL had been delivering a variety of educational services to the greater Worcester area for many years and had been specializing in ABE/ESL services for a year and a half. On August 25, Surendra Singh, Dean of the CLL, Deborah Gilman, ABE Project Coordinator at CLL. Martin Blatt (EOL), Sandra Stein (OTEP), Carl Proper, Debra Jahubic, Ray Belisle (ILGWU) and Dan Rao (President of the T.J. Maxx Distribution Center) met together to discuss the CLL's involvement in the proejct and overall program design.

Surendra Singh, an Asian Indian by birth, was particularly impressed by the progressive attitude of Dan Rao, also an Asian Indian educated in the U.S. Mr. Rao expressed a committment to providing his employees with a "quality" program and Dean Singh was fully prepared to follow through on this commitment. As a result of this meeting, excellence in adult education was made a priority by both management and the service provider. The positive effects of this agreement are still being felt. Together they want to keep on improving the program.

During the following week, Claudette Kokolski (Planning Manager at the South/West SDA which continued to administer the project after it was moved from Framingham to Worcester) joined the other partners to discuss

the administration of the program budget and program design. It was agreed that an advisory board consisting of members representing all the partners would have an ongoing role in the development, implementation and monitoring of the project and would meet on an as-needed basis. The members of the advisory board are: Carl Proper, ILGWU; Dan Rao and Pat Flavin, Recruitment Director, T.J. Maxx Distribution Center; Claudette Kokolski, SDA; Barbara McCauley, CLL; and Cathy Rentch. A part-time coordinator would also be hired to oversee all aspects of program development, implementation, and monitoring. In January 1987, Cathy Rentch was hired as Coordinator by unanimous vote of the Advisory Board. She was an ABE teacher at the CLL, experienced in the philosophy and methods of the CLL and eager to take on a new challenge.

From the beginning, members of this partnership seemed able both to discuss their different perspectives on the need for providing ESL services and to agree on the parameters and organization of an ESL project. An advisory board would insure the ongoing representation of different perspectives within the project. A coordinator would make sure that information flowed as needed among the partners, and would bear the burden of day-to-day oversight of the project. It appears that an unusual degree of mutual respect among members of the partnership allowed the work to be conducted fairly directly. At the same time, no one expected overnight results, and consequently there was also room for ideas and agendas to evolve.

Program Start-Up

Outreach to and recruitment of students from the pool of 800 employees was multi-leveled. Flyers announcing the program in 5 languages -- Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, English and Spanish--were distributed in paycheck envelopes and were also posted on bulletin boards throughout the warehouse. In addition, Carl Proper and Martin DePozzo, the new ILGWU business agent toured the warehouse for a whole day, "like politicians," department to department, describing the program and recruiting students. Sixty people indicated interest in the program and 40 were actually registered. It was clear to the recruiters that the company's release time policy and on-site classes were seen as very positive aspects of the program.

The first week of the program was devoted to student assessment. Cathy Rentch and her team of teachers wanted to prepare their students for the classroom experience and to prepare themselves with as much information about their students as possible. In one to one sessions with students they encouraged confidence in the learning process, and they administered one or two of three standard test of language skills they had chosen for assessment purposes. The tests are: the English Language Skills Assessment (ELSA), the Cambridge Community Learning center ESL Literacy Assessment, and the Baltimore County Public School's Adult Language Levels (ALL) Management System. One teacher uses the Cambridge Literacy Assessment for lower level students and uses the

ELSA for slightly higher level students. No one is fully satisfied with the assessment tools available and the application of these measurements seems to be as much an art as a science.

Inspired by the New Bedford workplace education model the T. J. Maxx project also established a system of volunteer language coaches. A student is paired with a fluent English speaker and expected to speak only English with him or her at least twice a week for 1/2 hour during lunch. Coaches are union members employed at the associate level. These relationships between peers are meant to encourage confidence and facility in English language speaking skills and to build friendships where English can be spoken outside the formal meetings.

From the union's perspective, there was only one wrinkle in an otherwise smooth partnership. During the start-up period a press conference was held at the T. J. Maxx warehouse to publicize the Governor's general support of the workplace education initiative and to focus public attention on the Worcester partnership. The large T. J. Maxx logo behind the speaker's podium may have conveyed the idea that the project was initiated by the company, much to the chagrin of union leaders and members who had been pursuing this program for a long time. The union chose not to make an issue of this but did note that it would be important to educate the associates especially about the origin of the program. Even though Proper and other union members actively recruited students, it was not clear to students that the union was the initiator of the ESL benefit. An ocassional flyer describing the program on Zayre Corporation memo paper only supports the premise that the company is the program initiator. Union members acknowledged that it would be beneficial to educate students about the union's role in developing the program.

The only other problem associated with the start-up phase of the project was a lengthy and awkward registration for the first ten week cycle. The SDA required that all registrants submit a green card and proof of registered draft status and sign their names in the presence of a notary public. T.J. Maxx requires that all employees have green cards but program staff surmise that many immigrants do not register with the draft even though they are technically required to do so. This may have kept some employees from enrolling in class. Since in most cases CLL staff are not allowed to ask for these kinds of materials, staff wondered whether this was a DOE or OTEP requirement .

Description of Program

The structures that were established for the implementation of the ESL program during the planning and start-up phases have been fully integrated into the life of the program. Cathy Rentch is the acknowledged force holding the project together. She works 24 hours per week for the T. J. Maxx ESL project and in addition teaches 9 hours per week in the ABE program at CCL. She is the liason between the CLL, the union, management and the SDA. She coordinates recruitment and testing of new

students, oversees curriculum development, supervises teachers and language coaches, organizes staff development sessions and life-skills workshops and handles public relations for the project. She is also conducting a "Literacy Audit" to assess the kind and quality of literacy skills which are needed to perform specific job functions in the warehouse. Supervisors and employees had originally assumed (though to different degrees) that working in a warehouse required little or no English language skills. The audit will document the range and depth of skills that are in fact required to perform jobs safely and well.

Cathy Rentch convenes the Advisory Board as needed and telephones individual members of the Board as needed. None of the Advisory Board members feel the need to institutionalize meetings (ie: meet one time per month) at this stage of the project, though that might become necessary as the project grows. In the course of executing her daily job responsibilities, Cathy Rentch might converse with representatives from management, the union and the CLL, so partners are kept abreast of program developments despite the lack of formal meetings. Ongoing discussion about scheduling of classes, students' transportation problems, release time and the capacity to expand existing services keeps the flame of the year-old partnership burning.

Classes were originally scheduled to be held in the cafeteria but noise during the shift change disturbed students' concentration. Classes were relocated into a conference room. Space is at a premium in a growing company like T. J. Maxx and there are occasional tussles over the use of the designated conference room. Students and teachers are forewarned of a move to a different space. Ordinarily, two classes run concurrently in the same room--students in one class are seated around tables on the left side of the room, students in the other class are seated around tables on the right side of the room.

Between mid- February and June 30, 1987, fifty-seven (57) students were enrolled in four classes: low beginner, beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The cultural breakdown of these students is: thirty-six (36) Hispanic; twelve (12) Asian Indian; five (5) Southeast Asian; one (1) African; one (1) Russian; two (2) are undocumented. Thirty-nine (39) students are currently enrolled. Twenty-two (22) students are left from the original forty enrolled in the first cycle; seventeen (17) are new students enrolled in the second cycle.

Two classes meet Monday-Wednesday from 2:30-4:30 p.m.; two classes meet Tuesday and Thursday from 2:30-4:30 p.m. The company provides one hour of paid release time per class and the student commits one hour of his/her time per class. Students working the first shift leave their jobs an hour early. Students working the second shift come in an hour early.

Enrollment is evenly distributed among the four classes. The teaching staff consists of three teachers and two tutors. The teacher/student ratio is not

more than 1:10. One teacher conducts 2 classes, each of the other teachers conducts one class each. Both tutors are in class each day and work individually with students outside the classroom for a portion of the two hour class period. Occasionally a tutor may take 2-3 people out of a class and work with them as a group. Tutors also assist with registration and assessment of new students.

At the start of the program, the eligibility requirement for enrollment was three months employment at T. J. Maxx and a good work attendance record. It became clear to the partners rather quickly that the first three months might be when an employee would need ESL instruction the most--when his/her familiarity with the workplace is minimal and when friendships with co-workers are largely unformed. A new employee who is interested in participating in the ESL program is now referred to Cathy Rentch for an interview. There is an open entry/open exit policy although students are encouraged to make a serious committment to a ten-week cycle. Teachers follow up on students with more than two consecutive absences or with a noticeably large number of absences. Cathy Rentch meets with her teaching staff bi-weekly for one and 1/2 hours.

The educational philosophy of the workplace education program reflects the philosophy of the CLL. The CLL was very clear with other partners about not conceding control of educational policy to any other agency and sees the T. J. Maxx program as one more opportunity to operationalize its educational philosophy. That philosophy states that the needs of the adult learner direct the content and form of the learning experience. Teachers guide students through an ever-evolving process of personal and political empowerment by helping them to articulate the questions which are most important to them. In the slightly modified words of Surendra Singh: "In adult learning, empowerment means self-esteem. If you don't know the union contract, you can't negotiate. How can you have self-esteem if you can't negotiate?"

Implementing this educational philosophy requires a fairly sophisticated teaching style. A teacher facilitates rather than controls the classroom process. This can intimidate a novice educator. The teachers employed in the T.J. Maxx program are seasoned professionals who appear to find this empowerment model as exciting for themselves as for their students.

Teachers at the T. J. Maxx site incorporate job-specific, work-specific and life experience materials into the curriculum. Union contracts insurance forms and company policies on vacation time, sick leave, dress codes and absenteeism find their way into the classroom, as do topics like national unemployment rates, health and safety in the workplace, cholesterol and nutrition and AIDS.

The language coach component of the program is in full gear. The number of coaches has increased from 3 to 8 and more people have indicated interest in becoming coaches. Teachers and supervisors ask people if they

interest in becoming coaches. Teachers and supervisors ask people if they would like to become coaches, especially in order to pair a student and coach from the same department. (Teachers match students with coaches as carefully as possible.) People sometimes volunteer to become coaches because it's becoming a popular thing to do. While coaches were initially conceived to take on one student each, one woman has taken on four people and her table at lunch is reminiscent of foreign language tables in American university dining halls. Only here English is spoken and students might be Hispanic or Asian. One member of this expanded table is a woman who is unsure she wants to enroll in class but who enjoys participating in the lunchtime forays into grammar, vocabulary, and parts of speech. Another member of this table cannot attend class because of child-care schedule problems.

These examples indicate that the ESL program is impacting students and non-students alike and legitimating the study of English in ways that were unantiicipated. Language coaches are given an initial orientation and attend weekly supervisory meetings as needed. Cathy Rentch makes herself available for one and1/2 hours each week to the language coaches and finds that coaches continue to want more supervision and training. The SDA made it clear that it was not possible to pay coaches out of grant money, but the CLL has worked out an arrangement with QCC whereby coaches can enroll in one course per semester tuition free. This makes it possible for some coaches to continue their own educations, and the continuum of providing education services is extended to the community college level. Cathy Rentch has also organized two in-service training session for her teaching staff. One session focused on 1-on-1 technique in language teaching and the other focused on general techniques in language teaching.

The original ESL program grant included life/consumer skills workshops in the services to be delivered to students. Largely due to constraints on her time, Cathy Rentch has organized only one seminar to date on stress management in relation to study skills. She is currently working on a community resources session.

There is no standard procedure for evaluating student progress. The ELSA might be given as a pre/post measurement, but, for the most part, progress is determined by what students say and write and by how they speak on an inndividual basis. Teachers prepare individual progress reports which students are encouraged to share with their supervisors. Cathy Rentch and the teachers are aware of the need to move toward more standard documentation of student's progress and will continue to think about what kind of measure could be used that is consistent with the CLL educational philosophy. The absence of standard measures for assessing progress through the ESL program also makes it diffucult to determine when a student is ready to "graduate" from the program.

Cathy Rentch suggests that one way to steer around the tension between the programmatic need to measure a student's progress in relation to other students and the pedagogical mandate to allow students to develop at their own pace would be to create a learning contract with each student. Each student would literally contract with a teacher to stay with the ESL class until the stated goals were achieved. The goals would be negotiated between teacher and student and some opportunity for revising the contract might be built into the process. The Boston Shrimp Company uses this contract method.

Current Status

The ESL program at T.J. Maxx is evolving more sophisticated means to achieve its goals as it enjoys its current successes and evaluates its shortcomings. The students' own evaluations of their progress is very positive-- they see their facility in English increasing and they experience this a gain of something new and good, not as a loss of what is known and dear. It is said that in Worcester, ethnicity and maintaining root cultural values is more highly prized than in other cities in the Commonwealth. In the wrong environment, learning English could be seen as a denial of one's own culture.

Supervisors have also noted the improvement in the associates' abilities to speak English. Instructions on how to perform the day's jobs are now given in English without reliance on translations (which in hindsight contained more errors than supervisors suspected.). Whether all students fully comprehend all the instructions each day cannot be answered. But it is fair to speculate that, as Dan Rao suggested, supervisors and associates have changed their attitudes about learning and about their own inadequacies. Supervisors now understand more fully how frustrating it is not to speak or understand English in this culture. And associates are more self confident about speaking up and asking questions. Surendra Singh suggested that this change be understood as the broad impact of the ESL program on the "organizational culture" of the company. In an atmosphere of greater openness and less judgement about being a non- native English speaker, associates can get the information they need to perform the day's tasks competently.

Nonetheless, teachers still observe that supervisors need to be constantly apprised of their associates' progress and of the overall purposes of the ESL program. Upper level management was involved in the planning of the ESL program but supervisors were handed the project as a fait accompli. Attitudes toward students and the program might be more generous had supervisors been involved in program planning from the beginning. As teachers cultivate relationships with supervisors and encourage students to show their supervisors progress reports and other class-related materials, supervisors are more willing to ask teachers what they can do with employees they are having trouble with.

Throughout the program, native English speaking associates who need ABE or GED services have been envious of non native English speakers who were given this benefit. While some of the "why don't they teach us Spanish" jibes have diminished, the point remains that the current program ignores the needs of native English speakers. Cathy Rentch and others acknowledged this. They would like to focus more on the native English speaker in the future.

Although enrollment in the ESL classes is adequate (eleven short of the targeted fifty students), certain problems are keeping eligible students from ennrolling and staying in the classes. These problems include:1) scheduling problems with local buses and other means of transport; 2) the need for child care; and 3) employment in second jobs.

The current program schedule requires that a student arrive at work an hour before his/her shiift begins or stay at work an hour after her/his shift ends. Local buses do not make stops at the distribution center at odd i.e. non shift-based hours, which is when students leave the facility. When childcare issues, like having to pick up or drop off a child at a child care center or at a relative's home, further complicate the transportation difficulties, a student might simply drop out of class or not even bother to enroll. Similarly, if a student needs to start a second job shortly before or after the T.J. Maxx shift, s/he cannot enroll in the ESL program. The company has made extra transportation available, driving students to other bus stops and, in one case, actually donating the use of a van to a large family of Asian Indians, all of whom are enrolled in the ESL classes. The company is now considering extending release time to the full two-hour class period.

Cathy Rentch spends some of her time attending to these kinds of problems. Although she currently keeps up with her responsibilities as a three day a week coordinator, a full time cooordinator's job would allow her the opportunity to assess these and other difficulties more fully, to develop the life skills workshops described above, and to document the current program. To date, very little has been written about the history, development and goals of this workplace education program.

Although relationships among the partners were good to start with--the ILGWU, for example, enjoyed a peaceful relationship with the Newton Buying Corporation--no one foresaw the growth of this partnership into such a successful effort to deliver literacy services to employees at the workplace. In summary, several factors account for the success of this particular partnership:

First, the union and the company had complementary economic agendas. The union hoped to provide its members with some measure of future employability through education in a time of general economic crisis for the union. The company hoped both to facilitate communication in English between supervisors and "associates" (workers) to increase production, and

to draw new workers into its expanding business in a competitive labor market through a special benefit.

Second, the learning provider offered an experienced and skilled staff with a well-developed educational philosophy, and was given free reign by the other partners to develop a suitable program.

Third, representatives of each of the partners interviewed and unanimously agreed to hire a part-time coordinator who would be accountable to each of the partners for all aspects of program implementation.

Fourth, there was an element of serendipity which brought the right information to the right people at the right time.

Members of this partnership continue to be happily surprised by their capacity to cooperate with each other and to agree on common goals in the delivery of ESL services. They consciously strive to preserve and expand on what they now know is a unique partnership.

Case Study: Springfield

Introduction

In the Spring of 1986, the Hamden County PIC initiated two partnerships to bring ABE and ESL classes to two major employers in the city of Springfield. One partnership included the EASCO Hand Tool Company; Local 22804 (a directly affiliated AFL-CIO union), Local 1570 (Steamfitters and Boilermakers); the Massachusetts Career Development Institute (MCDI), and the Hamden County Employment and Training Consortium (SDA). The other partnership included the Adult Learning Center (OWL) of the Springfield Public School System, Baystate Medical Center and the SDA.

Each of the partnerships had a focus that made it an interesting demonstration project for the first year of the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative. The focus of the EASCO partnership was on upgrading the literacy and basic education skills of senior employees in a mature industry undergoing a significant change in its mode of production. The Baystate partnership hoped to bring ESL and ABE classes to limited English speaking employees (kitchen, laundry, and building and grounds staff) of the second largest provider of medical services in Massachusetts. The gap between the conceived scope of services and the programs which were eventually delivered at these two sites provides insight into the organizational mechanisms required to implement workplace education programs.

EASCO Hand Tool Co.

History/Background

For roughly the last fifteen years the Springfield/Hamden County economy has been characterized by a shift from a manufacturing base to a service base. While this reflects the economic condition of the Commonwealth as a whole, the city of Springfield continues to experience an especially difficult transition. Most manufacturing companies have either left the region or shut down. EASCO is the last large manufacturing company left in the city and it has shrunk in size from 1400 workers (in 1972) to its current 450.

In order to compete with foreign markets and buy a chance for survival, EASCO is retooling its manufacturing process. As a result, workers will be required to exercise more sophisticated math and reading skills on more sophisticated machines. The average employee is 53 years old and has 25 years seniority. Over 30% of EASCO employees are limited English speaking, mainly Portugese. It is estimated that 20% of the work force is functionally illiterate in the current production mode and that 70% of the work force will be functionally illiterate in the new "focused factories." Now in the hands of a Baltimore-based holding company, EASCO has to upgrade the skills of its workforce or it will be forced to close.

Management was extremely supportive of the workplace education program, believing that it would be possible to reskill workers in time to meet the new production methods and schedules. Union support of the program was also strong. Union leadership recognized the risk that union members ran if they did not upgrade their skills-- loss of job and little chance of reemployment at the same union pay scale-- and saw the workplace education program as some insurance against that risk. Union leaders were aware of broad-based literacy programs offered through the Consortium for Labor Education in New York. However, it appears that the unions played a minimal formal role in the design of the EASCO project.

Political leaders in the Springfield community from the PIC, SDA, Mayor's Office and the MCDI had watched large businesses leave the Springfield area for over a decade. The MCDI had offered a range of programs to Springfield residents to help upgrade their general educational and job-specific skills over that same time period. All were very eager to access State funds which would deliver educational services to one of their own companies in the hope of keeping it in town. The execution of the program fell to the MCDI.

Program Start-Up

The company made its committment to the program tangible in three ways: 1) by agreeing to full release time for three hours of instruction per week; 2) by building a classroom for the program; and 3) by having Kimball Martin, EASCO Manager of Operations, accompany MCDI officials and union representatives in the first recruitment tour of the plant. The recruitment team generated such enthusiasm for the program that 193 students signed up and were subsequently tested with the TABE locator. MCDI and EASCO management agreed to enroll the employees with the lowest skills--those who tested below the fourth grade level--in the classes. These students would all require an ESL program. It is not clear how this decision was made or whether its consequences were fully discussed.

Of the 70-odd students who were eligible under the new guidelines, 50 were selected for enrollment. This selection process was not random. John Conde, a long-time employee who was especially supportive of the program, briefed Jonas Barrientors, the ESL teacher, on the history and current job status of each potential student. They grouped students together to maximize the potential for interaction and learning. Recruitment was also accomplished through posting and bidding, within union contract parameters. The fifty students were further evaluated with the TABE, the Stanford Diagnostic, and the EDL McGraw-Hill Reading Test.

Program Description

Workers enrolled in the program receive 3 hours of instruction per week. ESL and math skills are both taught, although there is an emphasis on ESL. There are five different "sections" meeting at the following hours: Wednesday 7:00-10:00 a.m.; Thursday, 12:30-3:30 p.m. and 3:30-6:30 p.m.; and Friday 12:30-3:30 p.m. and 3:30- 6:30 p.m. These hours accomodate all

shifts so all of the selected employees have access to classes. There are 31 students in the program--almost all of whom are Portuguese. Only 3 students are women. The workforce at EASCO is primarily male. The teacher/student ratio is not more than 1:7. The EASCO classroom or "learning lab" is a bare room set up with enough tables and chairs to accomodate twenty to twenty-five people.

The educational philosophy is described as "applied training"--determining the individual needs of students and modifying curriculum and teaching style to meet those needs. The curriculum is developed by the MCDI staff, including Mr. Barrientos, who is the author of several texts he uses in his classroom. The curriculum used in the EASCO project is not job- or workplace-specific, but within the "applied training" approach needs can be understood as job-specific as well as developmental. Learning proceeds at the pace of the learner. Methods for monitoring and evaluating student progress are built into the MCDI curriculum.

The EASCO program is overseen by an MCDI supervisor who relies largely on memos and informal meetings with the ESL teacher to keep him informed about the progress of the program. Other than this there is no mechanism for keeping partners informed about the progress/problems of the program or for discussing the different concerns which each of the partners brings to the program. While the teacher is in a position to observe the failures of communication, he is not empowered to address them.

Current Status

Each of the partners has strong opinions about the current status of the program. Students clearly see their improvement in English and math, as does their teacher. The major concern voiced by students and teacher was that the scheduling of classes minimizes learning by institutionalizing a seven day break between classes. Union leaders note that they hear students speaking English more often and more fluently on the shop floor. However, management is disillusioned by the amount of time it is taking to uppgrade employee skills and doubts that the current approach will help the company meet its new production needs.

Students are satisfied because they like their teacher, enjoy the learning experience, and believe they are working toward greater job security. Union leaders recoognize that the increased capacity to speak English on the shop floor is fundamental to a change in overall production methods and fully support the progress they see. Management, however, is working within the constraints of a three year plan which requires employees to be fully skilled in the new areas of blueprint reading, variable guaging, and statistical process methodology. It is not surprising that management is impatient with the current non job-specific curriculum.

While management supports the efforts of students to increase basic skills and acknowledges the informal benefits of the program, it is not clear to

management that the ESL program can train employees in the new skill areas as quickly as management needs. Management "is not running a school; it is running a business". The disillusionment of management results in small acts of disrespect which undermine the credibility of the program: locking the classroom door; using the classroom for meetings and leaving the room dirty; occupying the room during scheduled class time. If the link between classroom activities and learning new production skills was more visible, it is unlikely that these things would occur.

The partnership built a set of expectations for the workplace education program which were congruent with business needs, but the execution of the program fell short of meeting these needs. In effect, the workplace education program as currently organized functions more to educate workers who are likely to be dislocated than it does to reskill workers to perform new jobs. It has taken the first year of the demonstration project to clarify this disparity. Management and the union are joined in a major goal: to keep the EASCO company in Springfield. Reskilling the current workforce is the way to accomplish this goal. With the help of an educational program specifically designed to link ESL/ABE skills to the performance of new technical skills, this might be possible. This approach requires a very high degree of cooperation and interaction among the partners.

Specifically it would require: 1) coordination and oversight by a person thoroughly acquainted with the students, curriculum, and organizational structure of the company 2) ongoing formal discussion of goals by all the members of the partnership 3) a method to incorporate results of ongoing discussions into daily implementation of the program. Teachers and management could in effect collaborate on individual teaching plans for students. The curriculum could expand to include job specific areas. And the classes could be scheduled differently so that students meet for shorter periods, more frequently.

Baystate Medical Center:

History/Background

In the late '70's and early 80's, the OWL Center ran a very successful ABE/GED program at Baystate Medical Center. It was so successful that when public funding for the program dried up, Baystate kept the program going for a few years as part of its own education and training services. When the opportunity to establish an ESL program appeared through the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative, the partners were delighted and anticipated a particularly easy and successful program.

The need for ESL and ABE classes was clear. Nearly all the employees in the maintenance and service departments at Baystate are limited or non English speaking. These employees did not use community-based programs, so bringing services to the workplace was important. If these employees did not upgrade their skills, there would be no opportunity for

them to advance. Baystate has a built-in incentive and promotion system. As employees demonstrate increased abilities in math and English, they are considered for promotion. So the incentive to learn is concrete. Raymond Morrow, Director of Adult Education for the Springfield Public Schools alerted Robert Heon, Director of the OWL program , that the Baystate program was likely to begin in September '86. Morrow was a member of the grant planning group, and, in concert with William Ward, PIC Director, and Frank Gillune, Special Assistant to the Mayor, drafted the grant. The OWL center began to prepare for classes.

Program Start-Up

During the early planning stages, John Secco, Assistant Director for Education and Training at Baystate, offered to coordinate outreach and recruitment for the proposed ESL/ABE program through existing channels at Baystate. OWL and School Department personnel accepted this offer. OWL had recruited its own students for the original ABE/GED program, but it was amenable to having another partner take on the current round of recruitment, and to relieve itself of that role.

Two classes were to be offered, one ESL and one ABE. Baystate advertized the program in three ways: 1) in the Catalogue of Educational Offering, which describes all the courses offered through the Office of Education and Training 2) in the Baystate newletter 3) on closed-circuit T.V., where a graduate of the former GED program who is still employed at Baystate talked about the impact of the program on him and his career development. In the autumn of '86, a "good number" of students expressed interest in enrolling in the ESL/ABE classes.

In fact, the program did not begin until February '87. An administrative problem at the state level prevented DOE funds from being disbursed until early winter. The program could not begin until monies were in place (this happened in late November) and one delay led to another. By the time the program finally started up there were only four students interested in enrolling in the ABE component. Heon dismissed the ESL teacher he hired because there were no students to enroll in the class. The dimension of the problem did not come to the atttention of Heon or Morrow until February when the SDA which was monitoring the program began to ask questions about enrollment.

Program Description

According to Heon, on May 27, 1987, four students--Hispanic males in their early twenties--were currently enrolled in an ABE class taught by Leonard Carroll. (According to an SDA monitoring report dated April 28, '87, recruitment was intensified as of April 6, and enrollment was up from four to eleven.) Mr. Carroll taught in the former GED program and was asked to return to Baystate on the basis of his good performance.

Classes are held from 3:30 - 5:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Students attend classes 50% on release time and 50% on their own time.

Although one room, probably a doctor's conference room, was supposed to be designated as a permanent site for the classes, students are frequently moved from one room to another. It is difficult for students to move from one room to another class after class, and it is felt that this was a detriment to enrollment in the early phases of the program.

The OWL educational philosophy stresses one -on- one developmental learning . The curriculum includes the following materials: Developing Key Concepts in Comprehension (Barnell Loft, Ltd.) Series A through F; Program Reading for Adults, McGraw -Hill Series 1 through 6; Proficiency in Written English (Hammond) Series 1-2-3; Steck-Vaughn GED materials; Sullivan Math Series (McGraw-Hill) 1 through 6; Hammond Math Skills. Students are assessed with the TABE, the Baltimore County (Maryland) Design for ABE, the Gates-MacGinitre Reading Test , and a reading list developed by OWL.

Current Status

With only a fraction of the proposed number of students in the ABE component of the program, there is serious doubt about whether the Baystate program can continue. OWL Center staff will try to recruit students on its own, as it did in the former GED program. But with summer vacations approaching, it is doubtful that a significant number of students will enroll.

There are several reasons which can explain the failure of the Baystate program to live up to its original expectations. The partners offer the first three of the following reasons with different degrees of emphasis depending on their role in and perspective on the overall program. Other reasons are deduced from the configuration of the partnership and from confusions within the original program design:

1. Failure of the recruitment effort to reach the target population. The main thrust of the recruitment effort was through the print medium--through the Training and Education course catalogue and the medical center newspaper. This is adequate for people who can read but inappropriate for nonreaders or for people who do not read English. The closed circuit T.V. piece, while electronic and not print, may have intimidated some low-skill students by its focus on GED classes. The former GED student who narrated the ad is a highly motivated achiever with whom low-skilled students might not easily identify. Over the years, OWL staff developed its own style for pitching its program to low-skilled students. OWL staff should have continued to do their own outreach. No one can describe a program better than the ones who deliver it.

2. Failure to start the program on time. The delay from September to February dealt a severe blow to the program. It is generally agreed in the partnership that even adult learners catch the back-to-school bug and are ready to enroll in classes in September. Starting classes in February or March is more problematic. It is cold outside; it gets dark early; and people

do not want to start something new. State funders bear some responsibility for the funding delay, although it is unclear whether the Springfield Department of Adult Education could have come up with an interim fiscal stategy.

3. Pressure on employees to work overtime. Each of the departments targeted for student enrollment in the ABE/ESL program had an average of forty-five (45) vacancies this year. Consequently, employees were offered a lot of overtime. Sometimes there is even supervisory pressure to work overtime. Faced with the opportunity to attend classes or to work more, many employees will choose to work, especially in an environment where the work is more highly prized than attending classes. It is unclear whether the scarcity of workers in these departments will continue into the next year.

4. Confusion about the types of classes being offered. The Workplace Education Initiative stresses the need to service employees with under eighth grade skills levels. While the first year Baystate grant states that ABE and ESL classes would be offered, OWL and Baystate both see the need to offer GED instruction as well. Baystate went so far as to advertize a GED class in its spring catalogue, and this is clearly one of the courses offered under the auspices of the workplace education grant. There is no mention of ESL or ABE classes in this catalogue. Low skilled students are unlikely to respond to GED class notices; GED classes are a step beyond them. Advertizing GED classes indicates an overall confusion about the range of services offered under the auspices of the workplace education initiative that tainted recruitment efforts.

5. Lack of coordination and lack of systematic communication among the partners. No one in the Baystate partnership was given the responsibility for coordinating program efforts, and no method for keeping all the partners aware of the programs progress or problems was established. Consequently, some partners easily assumed that others were doing the work of coordinating and monitoring the program. There was no way to check the assumptions until the problems were almost beyond remediation.

6. The success of a former program. The success of the original Baystate GED program hindered rather than helped the new ABE/ESL program. Partners assumed that a former success implied a current success--we thought we knew how to do it, partners said. In fact, circumstances at Baystate had changed significantly since the early eighties and the new situation demanded an analysis and strategy all its own.

Case Study: Metro North

Employment Resources, Inc., the Metro North SDA, formed a partnership with the AFL-CIO Laundry and Dry Cleaning International Union (Local 66) and the Learning Development Center (an adult learning agency) to provide ESL and basic literacy services to union members at three local laundry businesses. This partnership had several special features that made it an interesting demonstration project for the first year of the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative. First, because of the key initiating role played by David Brenner, President of Local 66, this partnership exemplified a union-driven effort to provide educational services at the work-site. In addition, the plan was to provide ESL and literacy instruction for workers in three different industrial laundries. Thus the project would investigate methods for developing functional literacy efforts in small businesses.

Background

In early 1986, David Brenner, President of Local 66, approached Nancy Brown, Vice President of planning at Employment Resources, Inc. to discuss the possibility of on-site educational services for members of his union. Brenner had recently attended a meeting with the New York Consortium for Labor Education, hosted by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor. As the newly elected president of Local 66, he realized that education was a basic need of his membership, a largely immigrant workforce with low levels of previous education and very limited English proficiency. English skills would enable workers to speak up, individually and collectively, about problems at work and would improve the ability of the union to communicate with its membership. Ultimately, higher skill levels might give some members the opportunity to move out into other higher wage forms of employment. While this type of mobility not be directly in the self-interest of the union, Brenner felt basic education was an important benefit to offer the members.

Because people working in the laundries would not be JTPA eligible, it seemed at first that a collaboration between ERI and Local 66 would not be possible. However, soon after this first conversation, the request for Workplace Literacy proposals was issued and the contact between Brenner and Brown was renewed. ERI, in conjunction with Local 66 and the Learning Development Center (LDC), a local adult education agency with a history of providing training for ERI programs, submitted a proposal for a workplace literacy project focused on laundryworkers.

ERI, Local 66 and LDC all agreed on a set of goals, within the overall framework set by the RFP for the workplace education initiative. They wanted to increase workers' English proficiency and general educational level in order to enable them to function better in the workplace, as well as in their families and communities. Specifically, all agreed that the projects should be directed at helping workers move toward functional literacy and develop transferrable skills.

Project Start-Up

Almost as soon as the proposal was funded, the project ran into difficulties developing sites for the classes. The proposal targeted three laundries that had expressed initial interest to Brenner, were contiguous to the Metro North SDA and thus employed people from the SDA. One of these laundries, Unifirst in Chelsea, turned out to be going out of business. Another, Crown's in Dorchester, was a large plant with three different shifts. While a high level manager at Crown's was willing to support the general idea of workplace education, it was much more difficult to negotiate actual class meeting times and places.

Because of the seasonal nature of the laundry business, workers at Crown were expected to do over-time at certain times in the year, while at slow times they might live as early as 1 p.m. The general plant manager showed little flexibility in the scheduling of classes; at times he seemed to consider the whole project a nuisance. David Brenner was, however, also able to obtain the cooperation of several bilingual supervisors who could communicate with the largely Haitian workforce. The manager did allow Local 66 and LDC to hold a brief orientation during work time and conduct individual diagnostic assessments with interested workers. This assessment was adapted from materials the teachers had obtained from the International Institute in Boston (similar to the B.E.S.T. test).

By late October, 14 workers had expressed interest in the program. Yet, after a number of meetings involving ERI, Local 66, LDC and the plant manager at Crown's, it became clear that the company would not allow release time for the class, and that it would be impossible to hold a class after work hours, both because of the number of different shifts and the seasonal nature of the work. Negotiations with Crown remained stalled until March. Finally LDC offered to hold an early morning class, before the first shift began; Brenner found that at least 10 of his members would be willing to come in at 6 a.m. for ESL. A teacher who could commit to an early morning schedule was hired and students began class in mid-April.

Only the third projected site, Whyte's in Lynn, proved relatively easy to develop. A small company of approximately 100 workers, Whyte's had only one shift. Both the owner and manager saw the need for work-site education, particularly for the Hispanic workers in the plant. They saw the project as an opportunity to "help employees understand the job and communicate with us and their fellow workers." They suspected that language barriers were making Hispanic workers uncomfortable on the job and ultimately increasing the turnover rate.

Responding to flyers, a number of workers came to a brief after-work orientation; those that were interested participated in assessments. The diagnostic assessment for the ESL class was the same one the teachers had used at Crown. The ABE teacher was able to use the Gates Test with only one student whose reading was at a high enough level. For the others, she

made up her own "informal." Two classes, one focusing on ABE and GED preparation and another on ESL, began early December.

During the fall and early winter, Local 66 could not come up with a third site. Where Local 66 was in an adversarial relationship with the employer, a negative response was almost automatic. Some employers saw it as an empowerment tool for the union and therefore probably detrimental to the company's interests. Even at plants like Crown where there was not an adversarial relationship, Brenner had overestimated the willingness of managers and front line supervisors to support the program. There seemed to be the feeling that workers could, or even should pursue English skills on their own; there was also the worry that if they developed such skills they would be more likely to leave laundry work.

Furthermore, David Brenner's own time was at a premium. Local 66 has a very small staff of mostly part-time people. Brenner himself, although enthusiastic about workplace education, found that he could spare only 5-10% of his time.to the workplace education project. A strike in Chelsea pulled him away during the Fall months when he had planned to devote more time to site development.

By February of 1987 it was clear that a third laundryworkers site for workplace education was very unlikely. Finding that the workplace education project was serving many fewer than the predicted 55 students, ERI responded favorably to an inquiry from Middlesex Community College about the possibility of supporting a workplace education initiative they wished to undertake. Chris Brennan, the Director of the Business and Industries Program at Middlesex Community College contracted with ERI to provide a 15-week ESL class for workers at the Marriot Hotel in Burlington.

In undertaking the negotiations with MCC, ERI was, in effect, agreeing to oversee a second workplace education project, with a different set of partners and a different client base. Adele Spier, the Program Manager in the Business and Industries Program at MCC would devote approximately a fourth of her time (approximately 5 hours a week) to the coordination of the project. She hired a teacher with experience in ESL and workplace education. Fred Schofield, the Human Resources manager at the Marriot had promised his full support in this effort.

The actual work of recruitment fell mainly to a human resources specialist on his staff, who talked individually to cleaning staff and kitchen staff whom she knew to be limited in their English proficiency. In addition, employees were released to attend a brief orientation session conducted by MCC. Theier level of English proficiency was assessed through the Intercom Placement Exam (a written test required by the State College system) and a more informal oral assessment which was more appropriate to the skill levels of these students.

Despite the enthusiasm and cooperation from the Marriot Human Resources Department, however, sign-up for the class was smaller than originally anticipated. The Human Resources staff expected to draw people from both the housekeeping staff (largely Hispanic) and from the kitchen staff (largely Haitian). But recruitment was less successful than expected, particularly among the kitchen staff. People in the Human Resources Dept. attributed this to a kind of negative "peer pressure," with one or two of the workers convincing others not to attend. Earlier in the fall approximately 40 workers had attended an ESL class once a week; they were given (paid) release time to attend. By the time the workplace education class began, the funds for such training had been expended. Thus, workers enrolling in the workplace education ESL could not be paid for the two-to-three hours of work time per week that they would miss. According to those involved in recruitment efforts, this created "disillusionment" among some of the workers.

The Human Resources Dept., however, remained committed to the class. As the Manager put it, "The Marriot cannot survive without ESL." He felt strongly that better English skills would improve relations among the workforce and improve the climate for guests as well. He also saw ESL as a first step for many workers towards advancement within the Marriot chain, a large and steadily growing corporation. He was able to negotiate with the Marriot management to offer workers enrolled in the ESL course a bonus equal to half of the earnings foregone. This seemed to dispell some of the bad feeling, and by early May ten workers were ready to begin the class.

<u>The Classes</u>

At present the workplace education project encompasses four classes at three different sites. The Learning Development Corporation serves as the learning provider for three of these classes; MCC hired and supervises the teacher at the Marriot.

Whyte's is the site for two small classes: an ESL class with four regular students and an ABE/GED class serving three students. Students meet four times a week at the end of their shift, from 3:30-4:30. Both classes share a small cafeteria. A dropped ceiling was put in to protect the space from the noise of the plant floor. In several months the classes will move to a more spacious cafeteria facility that is being constructed.

The students in the ESL class are all Dominicans with a very low level of English proficiency. They range in age from their 20's to their 60's. Three of the four are women. A fifth student left recently due to pregnancy and another due to childcare problems.

The ABE/GED class began with seven students with a wide range of skill levels. Here too there was attrition. The three Vietnamese students all left (for higher skills training, to take on a second job, because of moving). A Dominican woman left due to pregnancy. Of the three remaining students

two are potential GED candidates, although now on a very basic level. The third has learning disabilities and is on a 4th grade level.

The classes at Whyte's are taught by teachers on the staff of LDC, the learning provider for the laundryworkers workplace education project. It was originally expected that these teachers would conduct classes at several sites; however because of the difficulties in site development described above, they ended up teaching only the classes at Whytes. While the site development negotiations were occuring in the fall, these teachers spent part of several weeks reviewing and gathering resources and developing curriculum for workplace education. The assumption on the part of LDC was that the workplace situation would be different from the ESL classes and other training programs offered in-house by LDC and thus would warrant a special approach.

In practice, however, the teachers have found it difficult to move quickly into work-related curricula. The different levels within the ABE/GED class has necessitated an individualized approach, with materials drawn from GED preparation books and other workbooks for low-level adult readers. The ESL students are at a lower level of English proficiency than the teacher had anticipated. He has found it necessary to begin by developing his students' self-confidence, so that they are willing take some chances with speaking even a few words of English. He has used a primarily oral approach, based on conversations, dialogues and other forms of group work and oral interaction.

For the first several months he focused on personal information, helping students learn how to introduce themselves, where they live, how they spend their time, what they need etc. He sees this approach as compatible with the longer-term goal of developing the students' workplace English skills. "Learning to say 'I'm thirsty.' or 'Excuse me, I'm hurt' can lead to students expressing themselves on the job, especially re health and safety issues which are important in a laundry. In addition, the ESL students are benefiting from verbal exchanges with the ABE/GED students who meet in the same room.

At **Crown's** there is an ESL class, five days a week, from 6:00 a.m.-7 a.m. The class meets in the worker dining room, which is on the second floor and hence separated from the plant noise and heat. The teacher was hired by LDC, based on her 12 years of experience teaching ESL and her ability to accommodate the somewhat non-traditional hour of this class. She meets once a week with the LDC teachers and educational coordinator, who provide her with materials that might be useful in the class.

The class is attended by 10 workers, all Creole and French-speaking Haitian refugees, all but one female. They range in age from their 20's to their 60's. The students have very limited educational backgrounds, most having completed fewer than 3 years of schooling. Most, however, already

have developed survival skills in English because they have been in the United States three or more years.

The teacher uses a communicative oral approach. She tries to relate the conversation to work as much as possible, and particularly to the social language people need at work. She draws lessons from such materials as "Your First Job" (English That Works series) and the union contract. Since the class began, several students have joined.

The Marriot class meets twice a week from 2:00-4:00. Students miss up to an hour and a half of work time. The class meets in a different room each day, depending on which function rooms the hotel has not rented for that day. The days when the class meets, the Human Resources Specialist calls each of the supervisors to tell them which room will be used and to ask them to remind the students. The cooperation of the Supervisors has thus been crucial to the functioning of the class.

The teacher for the class was hired by Adele Spier, the program coordinator from Middlesex Community College. She had worked with MCC before, doing workplace ESL at another hotel in the area. She utilizes an adult, collegial approach and relies on English immersion techniques for ESL. The emphasis is on functional language--teaching people things that will be immediately useful to them. Because the students are at several different levels of English proficiency the teacher has grouped them and tries to work intensively with one group at a time on pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence construction. Others spend the time completing assignments (in the "Side by Side" curriculum).

At the time of the site visit the Marriot ESL class had only been meeting for a few weeks. The program coordinator and the teacher, who meet two-three times a week, are still very much in the process of active curriculum development. They plan to incorporate more workplace information and take better advantage of the work setting. Adele Spier plans to meet with managers and supervisors in the departments represented in the class in order to solicit their ideas and expectations regarding the class. She would also like to start an ESL Club where students can practice their English and interact with English-speaking supervisory staff at the Marriot. So much of the workforce is at low levels of English skills that students get very little chance to speak English outside of the class itself.

<u>The Partnership</u>

The original partnership involving Local 66, ERI and LDC continues to function, but has changed from a more structured working collaboration to an informal communication arrangement among the various parties. During the fall months, the lead people in each of the three agencies met regularly to deal with the problems in the site development. Since January, however, the group has not met, relying instead on phone communication when there is a question or problem.

Each of the partners estimated spending less than 10% of their time on this project. The coordination function is thus not centered in any one person or agency. The gap left when David Brenner withdrew from an active initiator role has never been filled and the original conception has not been realized. Nevertheless, the three teachers feel they are getting the support they need in order to do their work effectively and a steady, albeit small core of students continue to attend each of the classes.

The second partnership, developed with the addition of the Marriot site, involves ERI, Middlesex Community College and the Burlington Marriot. Since the initial contact was made between the Director of the Business and Industries Dept. at MCC and the Assistant Director at ERI, the Program Coordinator at MCC has played a key role in facilitating the communication and collaboration among the various members of the partnership. She herself spends time at the site each week meeting with people in the Human Resources Department at the Marriot as well as with the teacher of the class. Her intent is to continue this kind of active collaboration.

Current Status

Laundryworkers Project

Two aspects of the laundryworkers project have made this an important project to observe and assess: 1) The initiation of the project by a union representing a particularly low-paid, low-skilled segment of service workers; 2) The carrying out of the project in small business settings with relatively narrow profit margins. These special features have also made this a difficult project to implement. The project has fallen short of meeting its projected enrollment goal of 55 students. As was described above, two rather than three sites for classes were found and the classes themselves have also been smaller than was anticipated.

The union president, with full responsibility for the operation of a local representing hundreds of workers, has not been able to sustain a coordinating role for the project. While very committed to the idea of workplace education and critically placed to identify potential sites and recruit workers, he has not been in a position to meet the daily responsibilities of developing and maintaining these sites. The small business aspect to the program has also created difficulties. Operating on relatively small profit margins in a seasonal industry, these laundry plants lack flexibility regarding class times and lack the resources to support paid release time for workers.

Despite these difficulties, the laundryworkers project is reaching a population that is very much in need of educational services. Many are recent immigrants with families to support. The women rush home from work to cook, clean and care for children. In many cases the men hold second jobs in order to make enough income for their families. This population is thus very unlikely to take advantage of courses offered in

community learning centers or through local high schools. Almost all of the students interviewed indicated that they would not have the opportunity to improve their English skills if it were not for the workplace program.

It is too early to assess the impact of the project on the students. Most of the students began with a very low level of English proficiency. There are indications, from the students themselves as well as their supervisors at work, that they are beginning to feel more self-confident and more comfortable with English. But there has been no real measurement of this progress. Both the SDA and learning provider believe substantial progress is occuring, but that the equivalent of "grade level improvements" will take much longer--because of the low level of proficiency at which students began and the relatively low intensity of the classes (4-5 hours/week).

All of the partners think that if the project continues it can reach the goals of helping workers develop functional literacy and transferable skills, but that the other goals established by the Workplace Education Initiative--to increase workers' earning power and work status--may not be realistic. The laundry industry offers few promotional opportunities, even for workers with greater English skills. The people interviewed all believe that as a result of the educational opportunities, workers will function better on the job and in their communities and homes, and that this is reason enough to continue the project.

The program manager at ERI stated that he thought the most important state-wide outcome of the project has been to identify a "hidden need among a working poor population" who definitely need services but are currently not targeted to receive them. In fact, virtually everyone connected to the laundryworkers project agreed that it is very appropriate for the State to encourage and support workplace educational opportunities for these workers. Whether such opportunities can be created at small plants, as well as in major corporations with more resources, remains a question deserving of further research and evaluation.

The experience here would suggest that it is easier to design and implement such programs at larger corporations such as the Marriot. But, if workplace education projects were to focus only on larger corporations, such as hotel chains, the State would be leaving out the large numbers of workers in small businesses and shops where the business itself cannot support such services for its employees. The Human Resources Department at the Marriot offered ESL classes to workers before this project. The laundries probably could not and would not do so.

In its first year of operation, the laundryworkers project has been able to obtain the full cooperation of one laundry plant. The top level management at Whyte's laundry is very pleased with the program and wants very much to see it continue. Even at Crown's, where management was much more reluctant, the regular participation of employees has resulted in more support from the company for the program. The enrollment goal for the

first year may simply have been unrealistic given the amount of work involved in developing multiple sites.

It is the recommendation of the documentation/evaluation team that the partnership overseeing the laundryworkers project designate a coordinator for the second year. The difficulties inherent in a multiple site project require a concentration of energies and effort not possible when none of the parties involved has more than 5-10% of their time available for coordination.

Middlesex Community College-Marriot Project

The ERI-Marriot-MCC partnership is so recent that it is difficult to assess its functioning or the progress toward meeting the goals of the project. The program coordinator is planning to assess the workers' progress at the end of the 15 weeks for which funding was available. It is her expectation that results will not be evident in so short a time. "We are talking about people who do not speak the language and who have a low self-image. It is hard to see much progress." She would like to see a much longer range project, at least a year in duration for the workers enrolled.

All of the parties to this partnership would very much like to continue and expand the ESL class after the contracted 15 weeks. They are pleased with the class thus far, especially with the fact that 10 workers have made a real commitment to attend each time. The Human Relations manager has stated that he thinks he can convince the Marriot to commit additional monies to the program. If he is successful, workers who enroll would be given paid release time. He is also optimistic about eventual promotions for workers who remain enrolled in the program and substantially improve their English skills. He sees the Marriot as a large and growing corporation with many promotional opportunities.

The MCC program coordinator, however, cautions against judging a program in terms of such criteria as promotion which are not in the control of the educational provider or of the State. It is important, she stresses to have faith in education:"If you give people a year of ESL and/or of Basic Skills, they are on their way."

In the view of the documentation/evaluation team, it does not really make sense to keep the Middlesex Community College-Marriot project coupled with the laundryworkers project. The MCC-Marriot project does not involve a union, nor does it involve small businesses, the two unique features of the laundryworkers project. It might make more sense for the MCC-Marriot project to become part of a larger workplace education project coordinated by MCC and involving other large hotel chains in the Burlington area. The Business and Industries Dept. at MCC appears to have the interest and capacity to handle such coordination. Large hotel chains such as the Marriot rely on recent immigrants for a great deal of their workforce and thus have a strong self-interest in promoting workplace education for these workers.

Case Study: Lynn

Introduction

IUE/the Work Connection, a non-profit service organization sponsored by the New England District Council Two of the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Technical, Salaried and Machine Workers, formed a partnership with North Shore Employment and Training (SDA) and Operation Bootstrap, the Local DOE-funded provider of ABE services in Lynn. The partnership submitted a proposal to the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative to provide a "computer literacy" program to workers in danger of being displaced from their jobs.

The State notified the Work Connection that computer literacy per se was not the focus of the Workplace Education Initiative, and suggested that the project could be considered for funding if the proposal was revised to incorporate the use of computers into teaching basic skills to a target population of students with literacy skills below the eighth grade level. The IUE followed the State's suggestion and submitted a revised proposal with a new focus on teaching ABE with computers to students with low level literacy skills. The IUE's overall focus on the skills needs of workers in danger of being displaced coupled with the specific focus on using computers to teach ABE made it an interesting demonstration project in the first year of the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative.

History/Background

Peter de Cicco, President of IUE New England District Council Two and Chairman of the Board of the Work Connection, and Tom Flood, consultant to The Work Connection, had ongoing relationships with EOL representatives (in particular, Marty Blatt) who kept them informed about new directions for union-related programs. For five years, the Work Connection had provided support services to its members and to the Lynn community through projects like Supported Work, which eased welfare mothers into the workforce; a dislocated workers program; and a computer training program developed for an adult welfare population. The Work Connection was becoming increasingly concerned about the needs of potentially displaced workers and was interested in expanding its computer skills programs. So, news of the Commonwealth's Workplace Education Initiative fell on particularly receptive ears.

In a series of four meetings between May 14, 1986--the date of the State-sponsored technical assistance conference on workplace education--and the end of that month, representatives from the proposed partners, including presidents and business agents of local unions, met to plan their program. It appeared that the Workplace Education Initiative would allow the Work Connection to address the needs of two different populations of potentially dislocated workers. The goals of the proposed program were formulated to: 1) upgrade the computer skills and educational levels of union members who worked in companies liable to close in the near future; and 2) to

prepare the workforce at the Sylvania Company for increased use of computers throughout the company.

The focus of the original proposal was computer literacy. In fact, the program was called "A Computer Literacy Program"--with tutorial support in math, reading and comprehension skills. Operation Bootstrap was excited about this approach. Bootstrap teachers had taught computer literacy before and hoped that this would be a way to get women especially out of the factories and into offices.

While the focus on dislocated workers dove-tailed neatly with the goals of the Workplace Education Initiative, the focus on computer literacy did not. The Initiative's interest lay more directly in upgrading the literacy skills of workers with less than eighth grade competencies. If computers could be used to achieve this goal, then some level computer literacy might result in the process. In late July the proposal writers were informed by letter that they must change the focus of their program in order to be funded. In mid-September a revised proposal which incorporated the recommended changes was submitted.

Program Start-Up

The new proposal targeted a total of forty-five (45) students, thirty six (36) of whom would test at a functional level below eighth grade and nine (9) of whom would test at higher than an eighth grade level. (This latter group would receive computer-assisted GED preparation). Three union locals (Locals 263, 257, and 291) were to publicize these courses extensively through use of company bulletin boards and union newsletters as well as through"aggressive" individual recruiting by union leaders. In addition, the Work Connection would use interns and mentors (retired members of the greater Lynn community who volunteer time to programs) to recruit participants at large. The SDA and Operation Bootstrap would also refer candidates to the program.

Although the revised proposal does not name the target companies, project materials indicate that they are: Eastern Tool & Stamping, New England Carbide, Time Connector, Prime, W.S. Young, and Sylvania. Classes would be held at IUE headquarters in Saugus, a comfortable place for union members, in the evening from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Three two hour sessions were to be held and students could choose the two most convenient evenings to attend.

Recruitment strategies were developed by the Work Connection, particularly by Fran Gayron, the Executive Director. Operation Bootstrap was not involved in recruitment. It is difficult to ascertain how much "aggressive" recruiting of students was actually done. The program was advertised in local newspapers and in some union newsletters. Flyers were distributed (though samples were not available for review) and some person-to-person contact with plant managers was made.

Since none of the students currently enrolled in the program are union members, it seems fair to assume that recruitment efforts were insufficient and/or did not match the needs of potential students or their companies. An apocryphal story about student recruitment for this program tells how a Work Connection staff member went to a non-union shop to advertise the ABE program without mentioning it was union sponsored. The personnel manager of the host company was very excited about the program until, on a subsequent visit from Work Connection staff, he learned about union sponsorship and visibly blanched.

The absence of the service provider during the recruitment phase of the program is one indication that communication between the two agencies was not going well. The workplace education project was Bootstrap's first involvement in a large state grant and the small community agency conceded ground to the more experienced Work Connection. Operation Bootstrap expressed interest in doing some recruitment--it felt that no one could advertise the program better than the program itself--but when it was not invited to participate, it did not push the issue. For its part, the Work Connection was disturbed by what it saw as Bootstrap's shadowy role, but did not press for clarity. The SDA clearly identified itself in this partnership as an administrative pass-through and did not take an active role in monitoring the relationships between the other partners at this stage.

Program Description

The partners in this workplace education program are generally annoyed with each other for not fulfilling their respective responsibilities. Bootstrap bemoans the lack of coordination from the Work Connection; the Work Connection questions the sophistication of its service provider. The Work Connection suggests that the SDA be more responsible in administering the program; the SDA would rather not be accountable for a program for which it functions solely as fiscal intermediary. With no central coordinator or coordinating body to monitor the performance of the partners, it is easy for the partners to assume that someone else should do the job that isn't being done. There is no structure--formal or informal--whereby partners evaluate and work out the details of program implementation.

The ABE program is housed in the carpeted and panelled basement rooms of the Work Connection offices in Saugus. ABE Classes are held Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:00-8:00 p.m. and an optional computer literacy class is held Wednesday night from 6:00-8:00 p.m. One-on-one ABE instruction is given by a teacher from Bootstrap; computer assisted ABE lessons are supervised by an independent computer consultant to the Work Connection. A teacher-aide assists all classes.

The ABE teacher was recruited and trained especially for the Work Connection program by Bootstrap. She began her teaching responsibilites about eight weeks into the Work Connection program, replacing a veteran Bootstrap teacher who had made it clear to the Bootstrap director (as had other Bootstrap teachers) that she preferred to teach at Bootstrap and would

not teach elsewhere on a permanent basis. The new teacher is young, is an elementary school teacher by day, and has relatively little teaching experience. The Work Connection would prefer a more mature teacher.

Total student enrollment according to SDA records is 23; this is the total number of students enrolled since October, with no terminations. The breakdown of the SDA documented group according to grade level is as follows:

0-4.....1
4-7.....3
8-11.....15
12-over.....4

Average attendance is ten students per class, which puts the teacher/student ratio (including computer consultant and teacher aide) at 1:3. The educational philosophy at Bootstrap stresses individual, developmental and closely guided learning. Bootstrap uses the TABE as its basic assessment tool and and supplements this with the San Diego Word Test. Teachers appear to be satisfied with these measurements. The Bootstrap curriculum is a standard non-job specific ABE curriculum called the "Specific Skills Series" developed by Barnell Loft, Ltd. Additional materials come from The Essential Skills Series developed by the Reading Research Center at Cornell University. Sample computer programs used are Spell It and Word Attack. Monitoring and evaluation of student progress is done within the parameters of the curriculum being used. Students enjoy the interplay between computer-based and teacher- assisted learning and, according to the computer consultant, learn the computer programs quickly. The consultant informally assesses student progress by the amount of time it takes for a student to master a certain program.

Current Status

While the Work Connection is offering needed ABE-computer services to a grateful group of students--the Work Connection program has become a kind of satellite of Bootstrap in Saugus--it is not specifically fulfilling the terms of its proposal to the Workplace Education Initiative. Students are not union members; they are not employed by the companies targeted for potential shut down or change-over in technology; and they test at a higher skill level than the group targeted in the proposal. There is no indication that recruitment strategies are being seriously reviewed or changed, and therefore there is little hope that the targeted population will be reached.

There is a broader context in which the failure of the Work Connection to meet its goals can be understood. It is a context inferred from the conceptual changes required by the State during the proposal writing stage and supported by statements made by the Work Connection and Bootstrap staff. When the Work Connection submitted its first proposal for a computer literacy program, it was already administering a computer training program. There was a lot of enthusiasm about expanding computer skills services, and about tying these services to the needs of workers. Shops were

especially interested in computer skills training. Math and reading tutorials would be offered toward the higher purpose of achieving computer literacy, not as subjects in and of themselves.

There's little doubt in the minds of Work Connection staff that a computer literacy program would have filled their classrooms. The required conceptual changes in the proposal undercut this potential. The new program turned into just another ABE program with a little computer asistance thrown in on the side, and the project as a whole never developed a consciousness or philosophy about the need for ABE as such for workers.

It could also be argued that it is easier to recruit students into a computer literacy program than into an ABE program. Students who enroll in a computer course acknowledge computer ignorance. Students who enroll in ABE programs acknowledge ignorance of basic skills. This is a more personal and a more difficult thing to do. Service providers who are skilled at peddling ABE develop strategies to diffuse embarassment or shame at needing ABE instruction. But in this case the service provider, Operation Bootstrap, did not recruit.

Finally, the State may have erred by informing the Work Connection that they had been "selected as one of the pilot projects" in the Workplace Education Initiative in the same letter that stipulated funding was contingent on certain changes in the proposal. This kind of double message may convey greater surety about being funded than is in the funder's interest, and encourages an agency to submit a proposal for a program it is not fully prepared to implement.

Case Study: Lower Merrimack

The "AT&T Manufacturing ESL Program" represents a partnership between three actors, all located within the Lower Merrimack Valley Service Delivery Area: the Adult Learning Center (ALC) of the Lawrence public Schools, acting in the capacity of service provider; the City of Lawrence Department of Training and Development (DTD), serving in the role of co-sponsor, and AT&T Technologies in North Andover, the other co-sponsor and the project's principal company and source of employees.

The stated purpose of this program was to provide on-site basic and advanced manufacturing English literacy skills training to 80 limited English-speaking minorities and individuals employed in production and assembly positions. As indicated in their original proposal, the overall objective was "to develop and increase these skills in order to enhance job advancement opportunities." For a number of reasons this objective was difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, the project has made considerable progress during the first year and has demonstrated the capacity to strengthen its commitment and improve its coordination in this second year.

History/Background

The history of this partnership began in 1979, when AT&T hired hundreds of local Merrimack Valley residents for its then expanding production force. As the single largest employer in the region (approximately 10,000 workers) and a very desirable place to work (partly due to higher than average hourly wages and benefits), AT&T offered a good employment opportunity for a new wave of workers, many of whom were immigrants. When AT&T conducted a survey several years later and found a majority of these previously hired workers were still employed at their original entry job grade level, it determined that a major cause of this lack of mobility was the workers' limited language proficiency skills. It further determined that the attainment of English speaking, writing, and reading skills was necessary for career advancement and growth, as well as for increased awareness and safeguards regarding potential chemical and hazardous material.

Consequently, AT&T requested the assistance of the City of Lawrence Department of Training and (Manpower) Development in facilitating the development of a manufacturing-based ESL program to train identified workers in basic and advanced English language literacy skills. AT&T had previously worked with DTMD and a number of the company's staff managers and line supervisors had formed positive working relationships with key staff at the regional employment agency. The Adult Learning Center in Lawrence, which has a long history of involvement in literacy programs and its own working relationship with DTMD, became involved shortly thereafter as the learning provider. Although the unions agreed to the project and eventually signed a letter of concurrence, they were not actively involved in either the planning or implementation of the project.

The issuance of the request-for-proposal by OTEP was quite timely and apparently required no serious prompting by any of the state agencies involved in the workplace education initiative. There was interest and basic agreement among the three main parties to work together in setting up an adult literacy program, located at the AT&T site, and in developing an industry-specific curriculum that would ultimately advance three objectives: 1.) career adaptability/mobility, 2.) worker safety, and 3.) product quality.

Project Start-Up

The partnership that developed in the beginning was structured around a shared, decentralized model in which each of the partners carried out its primary reponsibilities after only limited consultation with the other actors. No single agency or person had primary responsibility for overall project coordination. Although each member of the partnership had sufficient skills, resources, and commitments to make the project a success, this collective supervisory arrangement was, at best, adequate.

When the various partners each experienced some form of organizational upheaval shortly after the program began, the effects presented a host of challenges for project oversight, coordination, and implementation. New hires and increased demands on staff at ALC created delays in developing and getting teaching materials to the educational staff. Re-organization and staff changes at DTMD resulted in periods without adequate liaison and leadership. Changing priorities, combined with strict visitation and procurement policies at AT&T, made it difficult to provide adequate support to the teachers or make timely interventions with the students.

Over the next several months, the project moved through many stages of development in a relatively short period of time. Most significantly, the individual partners assigned new staff to the project which helped to clarify responsibilities and improve coordination. The identification of ALC and DTMD staff--once again capable and committed to the day-to-day aspects of the program--helped considerably to stablize the project management and operations, as originally intended by the partnership.

Since AT&T was contributing considerable resources, including on-site classroom facilities and 50% release time, they handled most of the outreach, recruitment, and student selection activities. They publicized the program through internal organizational channel and developed an initial survey that identified 300 candidates. The field was then narrowed down to the final 80 students, based in part on a system of seniority and in part on language and basic skill assessment tests, administered by staff from the ALC and DTMD.

The Educational Component

The proposal was designed to serve 80 students during the first year, 40 basic ESL students and 40 advanced ESL students. The students were divided into four classes with approximately 20 students each. Two of the classes were designated for limited English speaking employees identified as having current skills ranging from zero-based to approximately 4th grade equivalent. The other two classes were for more advanced groups. Each of the classes met for one hour each day Monday through Thursday, a total of four hours per week over a 39 week period.

Typical start-up problems and considerations delayed the hiring of teachers, thereby preventing the two teachers from playing an active role in the screening of students or the development of an appropriate, industry-based curriculum. As a result, the education program could not take full advantage of its instructors' knowledge and experience. In particular, staff were not able to establish custom-tailored learning materials or design comprehensive teaching approaches that address the complex linguistic and different literacy needs of the students.

Nevertheless, the classrooms appeared to be simply-organized and well-run. Teachers worked hard to win the trust of the students and attendance was good, until midway through the program when the layoffs dropped class sizes to less than half the original numbers. Regardless of numbers, there was a steady emphasis on teaching English through a variety of oral approaches, ranging from the introduction of consonant and vowel systems to free conversation and dialogues. Because class sessions were relatively short and written materials were far from ideal, there was a reluctance to use textbooks.

There were several reasons the project often lacked appropriate educational materials, despite a general consensus around the proposal's main objectives. These are: First, industry or manufacturing specific curricula were not available at the beginning of the project. Second, the project was designed so that a curriculum would evolve over the course of the year. This was in fact happening, only slowly. Third, cooperation with AT&T was not always forthcoming, partly because of the large and bureaucratic nature of the place. This was especially true concerning access to industry specific, non-classified information for use in the curriculum. Fourth, the teachers and ALC staff realized they needed to develop different learning objectives and materials for the various levels of learners (survival ESL; beginner manufacturing ESL; and intermediate manufacturing ESL).

It should also be noted that educational materials and objectives addressing issues such as transferrable skills, increased worker productivity, increased worker earning power, or upgraded positions in the workforce were not directly considered or explicitly described in the curriculum.

Current Status

The AT&T Manufacturing ESL Program, despite a number of setbacks, has made reasonable progress and has demonstrated much potential with regard to its original (and revised) goals. It is a program with many encouraging features, including:

- a set of institutional actors that constitute a workable partnership;
- experienced and committed staff, located in each of the collaborating organizations, who now have clear roles and responsibilities concerning the program;
- access to a large number of resources and students at AT&T;
- interest on the part of AT&T in ESL and literacy programs that will at least result in improved worker safety and product quality;
- elements of an industry-specific ESL curriculum, based in part on original materials and in part on previous research and program materials;
- knowledgeable instructors with a clear understanding of student needs--linguistic, literacy, and personal;
- assessment materials and processes that have proven to be useful.

At the same time, there remain a number of problems and barriers to achieving the program's major goals. Many of the obstacles are well known and are already being addressed by the partnership. The most important example of this is a recognition of the need for a full-time coordinator. There are other areas requiring attention. One is the role of the union, which needs to play a more active role in program design and implementation. Another is the increased involvement of instructors in student selection and curriculum development. Each of these also seems within reach.

A more troubling concern is the possibility of new layoffs within AT&T. The earlier layoff of more than 1500 workers at the AT&T facility presented many strains and obstacles for the program midway through the project. Specifically, it created a rather disruptive period for the students--many of whom were laid off and could no longer attend the classes--and the teachers who were left to deal with serious decreases in attendance and morale. Staff and students handled that diffucult situation as well as could be expected. However, the lingering effects of the recent lay-offs and the possibility of future lay-offs have raised many issues and questions--organizational and educational, practical and political--that must be addressed, both at the local and state level.